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Original citation:
Meehan, E. (2010) Visuality, discipline and somatic practices: The 'Maya Lila' performance project of Joan Davis. Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices, volume 2 (2): 219+. DOI: 10.1386/jdsp.2.2.219_1

http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.2.2.219_1

Intellect

Visuality, discipline and somatic practices:

The 'Maya Lila' performance project of Joan Davis

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Abstract

The incorporation of somatic practices into dance training and production has implications for a dancer's experience of their own body but also affects the audience's role in relating to the work. Joan Davis is an Irish choreographer who uses the practices of Authentic Movement and Body-Mind Centering in creating site-specific, participative performances that she calls 'Maya Lila'. In this article, I investigate how Davis develops strategies from somatic practices to provoke the self-reflective capacity of dancers and audience members, rather than focusing on the external appearance of the performer's body. The Maya Lila project has also had an impact on my work as a performer and researcher, and I conclude the article by drawing attention to the impact of somatic training on my experience of discipline, surveillance and subjective agency.

Keywords

Authentic Movement

somatics

discipline

Irish choreographer

visual

Joan Davis

I first came across the work of Joan Davis after reading an article she wrote in *Inside Out* (2004), an Irish psychotherapy journal. Davis wrote about her desire to find direct expression from movement that was different from techniques she had learned as a dancer. For me, her writing challenged styles of physical theatre that I had encountered as an actor, based on regulating and controlling the body. I had developed a curiosity for movement through attending workshops with the Blue Raincoat Theatre Company from my home town of Sligo in the west of Ireland. The company worked through Etienne Decroux's corporeal mime, breaking down the movements available to each body part. By the time I read Davis' article, I had begun to wonder about movement that could be discovered by following internal impulses rather than applying external techniques to the body. I arranged to attend a somatic movement workshop led by Davis and the session revealed my confusion when I was offered the possibility for moving from sensation. It also exposed a rigidity of response despite the fact that I had been working through movement in physical theatre training and performances. This studio-based exploration with Davis developed into a doctoral research project examining the contrast between a disciplinary and somatic relationship with the body in performance.

Davis stages somatic-based performances in a variety of indoor and outdoor venues, although most frequently at the extensive gardens surrounding her house in Gorse Hill, Co. Wicklow, Ireland. She constructed a maze at Gorse Hill from living willow, containing scents of flowers and herbs, fruit for tasting, mirrors that distort the shape of the viewer, instruments, boxes with surprise contents, amongst other sensory material. This interactive environment is hoped to guide the audience into a somatic mode of experiencing the performances, as Davis invites them to become attentive to

changing sensory material. She uses mirrors in the installation to fragment how the body is visually perceived and to reflect each person's part within the performance. After engaging with the 'Willow and Mirror Tunnel', the audience move into a circular amphitheatre space where they can witness dancers improvising movement based on Authentic Movement practice, hopefully bringing a sense of heightened sensory and reflective awareness from the experience of the tunnel into their perception of the dancers' movements.

Figure 1: Willow and Mirror Tunnel, Gorse Hill (Photograph: Emma Meehan).

Davis chose the title 'Maya Lila' for her project, Sanskrit words for illusion and play. She borrowed the term from Richard Schechner's book *The Future of Ritual*, where he describes the performance attitude called 'maya-lila' in the traditional Indian performance form of *Raslila*. Schechner (1993: 34) comments that 'maya-lila generates a plenitude of performances: interpenetrating, transformable, nonexclusive, porous realities. All of these are play worlds that are the slippery ground of contingent being and experience'. In Davis' Maya Lila performances, realities are constantly shifting as movement emerges and transforms into something completely different. She often plays with transforming perceptions of everyday objects in surprising ways during the performances. On one occasion, she danced with a large cardboard box and I saw changing images of a baby in the womb, a child having a tantrum and an adult who is stuck and will not think 'outside of the box'. The Maya Lila performances emphasize the illusory aspect of identities in their environment, with the improvised content and the outdoor setting bringing many unexpected changes. Pets wander in the gardens and children are invited to play, while the weather switches from sun to rain, and this all

becomes part of the show. The idea that identities are unstable becomes apparent as movements and narratives form and melt away. At one performance, Davis moved with a large frond of pampas grass and declared that she was a cleaner although her fellow dancers eventually transformed her everyday 'dusting' actions into a chasing game. Davis (23 May 2007 interview) comments on the identities that emerge and transform in the movement that 'you're none of those things and yet you're all of them, so that's the illusory piece. And "lila" is just the play of relationship that goes on in life all the time'. In Maya Lila, play creates and destroys reality as it shifts and changes so that 'the basic ground of existence is maya-lila, an ongoing construction-deconstruction, destroying-creating' (Schechner 1993: 42). In the performances, the dancers create an image, scene or character only to allow it to swiftly transform into something else, reflecting the necessity of destruction for the next impulse to appear.

Of course, there are issues with the appropriation of non-western terms and practices such as maya-lila. In an era of globalization, access to international exchange has generated both positive connections and darker implications (Lanters 2005: 33; Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 10). At times, this 'borrowing' can be seen as a form of neo-colonization, where one culture takes from another, hollowing out meaning and homogenizing complex cultural practices for economic gain. Although it is impossible to avoid the negative connotations of borrowing from another culture, Davis has researched the background of the Indian maya-lila and this informs her performance practices. Reflecting the devotational connotations of *Raslila*, Davis practices the Hindu spiritual tradition of Advaita Vedanta (connected with maya-lila) and also considers Authentic Movement as a spiritual practice. Somatic forms, more generally, have been strongly

influenced by non-western practices, benefiting from the possibilities brought about by intercultural dialogue. For example, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen developed Body-Mind Centering from influences as diverse as yoga, t'ai chi and circus alongside the work of Eric Hawkins, Rudolph Laban, Irmgard Bartenieff and Marian Chace (Eddy 2009: 15, 2006: 86). Davis' work could be described as being closely aligned with aspects of some non-western dance traditions, particularly the emphases on body–mind integration and body awareness that uncover changing identities, elements that can be identified in Davis' work.

In preparation for the performances, Davis works with the dancers to bring awareness to creative impulses and to develop responsiveness to the performance environment. The dancers practice elements of Authentic Movement and Body-Mind Centering along with exploring discernment over the externalization of impulses in the form of movement in space, spoken words, singing, use of objects and storytelling. Although the performances are improvised, Davis (2007: 199) suggests that the dancers explore the possibility of composition within the changing combinations of bodies in space that emerge by becoming aware of how internal experiences relate to the wider performance environment. She attempts to create an environment where the performer can become author and editor of performance material, while basing these performance choices on the relationship with the changing context of the inhabited environment. At a performance at Greystones Gallery in Co. Wicklow, Ireland, I was struck by the clear composition emerging from within the changing landscape. As the performance unfolded, one of the dancers found a wooden ladder on the balcony of the gallery space. She inverted its upright position to create a horizontal post from one side of the balcony to the

other, creating a new playing space for the dancers. One performer sat under the shade of the ladder-bridge, while another hung out of the ladder-tree. With the horizontal line of the wooden ladder, the diagonal of a dancer's arms, the triangle of another dancer's knee against her leg and the vertical lines of the surrounding architecture, I noticed the composition of bodies in space. This form of aleatory composition seems to create moments that extend beyond the transience of the work, contrasting ephemeral interactions with freeze-frames that can be remembered after the performance.

In Maya Lila, the performers and audience are guided to focus on subjective, sensorial experiences of the space. The gardens and Willow and Mirror Tunnel provide a place for the audience to begin exploring the senses of touch, smell, sight, sound and taste. The dancers also tune into sensory impressions and externalize these through movement, sound, stories or interactions in the gardens and later in the amphitheatre space. Placing objects on the body is one way in which sensory experiences and responses are stimulated. In one photograph of the performances, dancer Maggie Harvey is adorned with feathers and bones, dressed by some of her fellow dancers. Although it is not possible for me to know the experience of the dancer, Maggie's still and focused expression provokes me to imagine the texture of the bones between her fingers, the feathers brushing against her upper arm and the rough rope against the back of her neck. In viewing this moment, I am brought to the awareness of my own remembered sensations of touch, texture, breathing and stillness in a kind of empathetic response. Although it is also a striking visual image, the moment stimulates me to become aware of my own psychophysical responses as an audience–participant. This brings me to consider

the focus on multiple senses in Maya Lila rather than a primarily visual engagement with the physical forms of the dancer.

Figure 2: Dancer as Sculpture, Maggie Harvey at Gorse Hill. (Photograph: Kevin Logan.)

As an approach to dance, like the work of other somatic-based performance practitioners, Joan Davis' work can be seen as a reaction against highly disciplined dance traditions that push the performer's body to its limits. Classically trained ballet dancer Jenny Roche (12 August 2008 interview) describes working with Davis for the first time as a relief following an intense period of dance as she says: 'I had almost come to the end of the road as a dancer where I couldn't do this pushing anymore, and [in Maya Lila] I could have a different approach to my body where it wasn't so punishing and so pushing all the time.' The emphasis on pushing the body to fit ideals of form in dance can have a detrimental effect on body image, situating the dancer as an object of the audience's gaze. Jill Green notes on dance education:

> The constant focus on an externalized view of the body, as reflected in the mirror, objectifies the dancer's body and requires students to strive to achieve a specific 'look' while being 'corrected' so that the students perform 'proper' dance technique. (1999: 81)

The use of visual surveillance as a tool of discipline in society is discussed by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and his writing has been drawn on in comparing disciplinary and somatic approaches to the body. Foucault suggests that institutions such as prisons and hospitals operate through systems of observation, documentation and regulation of the body in order to discipline subjects. He discusses

(Foucault 1977: 195–230) Jeremy Bentham's model of the panopticon prison where the prisoner is observed unawares by a concealed viewer, thus the prisoner imposes self-discipline because of the fear of being seen at any time. Foucault's understanding of discipline in society relates to the operation of power in the system of performance production, whereby an individual is disciplined and self-disciplines under the constant threat of surveillance in training and performance.

The reliance on internal impulse and sensory stimulation over dance techniques in Maya Lila reflects a move away from styles that favour particular body types and movements. Fortin and colleagues note:

> Somatic education can defy the dominant discourse in dance, a discourse which promotes an ideal body, supposes an attitude of docility, maintains a normalisation of pain and endorses the external authority of the professor/choreographer as the primary holder of power and knowledge.[1] (Fortin et al. 2009: 50)

Somatic approaches to dance training and performance are expanding across Europe and America, although still relatively new in Ireland. Bernadette Sweeney (2008) has highlighted the marginalization and control of the body in performing arts in Ireland, suggesting that ideals of nationhood have been bound up with notions of Catholic morality, with implications for the performing body. At the same time, in a highly globalized post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, attitudes to the body have changed vastly and now Irish audiences are bombarded with visual images of commodified bodies in the global marketplace. While this suggests a type of physical and sexual liberation, these images often extend the idea of the externally perfected and disciplined body. Responding to the

focus on visual appearance and isolation from the body in a contemporary Irish landscape, Davis attempts to provoke a reflective awareness of one's internal sensory experiences and the relationship between body and environment.

The relationship between visual perception and other sensorial experiences has been an important area of research in Maya Lila. In the ground form of Authentic Movement taught by Janet Adler, the mover moves with eyes closed, in order to heighten the other senses and turn the attention inward. However, Davis (2007: 38) undertook explorations in moving with open eyes in order to bring Authentic Movement into a performance context, as she felt that opening the eyes 'brought the Mover into more conscious relationship with the Witness'. At the same time, Davis (2007: 64) reflects that opening the eyes in Maya Lila caused her to separate from somatic experience as she notes that 'the struggle was between being pulled into my external environment and staying connected to myself'. As a result, she devised a number of exercises with the eyes to explore the visual in relationship with the rest of the body. Davis (2007: 64) comments that 'by coming back in to myself, my eyes simply became another limb. They became another part of the movement. So the exercise was scanning, seeing without reaching into seeing'. The performers in Maya Lila try to track their own responses at the same time as receiving visual information through the eyes, developing the 'internal witness' or inner gaze of Authentic Movement practice. In addition, the eyes become another body part rather than the dominant mode of gaining information on the environment. Bringing awareness to the fact that the eyes are part of the body identifies the subjectivity of visual interpretation and seeing then becomes an act of experiencing and reflecting rather than observing. At the performances, the soft focus of the performers' eyes suggests that they

are not directing the gaze at one point, but rather, the attention is focused inwards while scanning the landscape.

Davis has also explored methods of inviting the audience to watch the dancers and surroundings at the same time as remaining somatically engaged. She has created interactive installations to provide a space for awakening the senses, as audience members are invited to notice the texture and flavours of materials, along with taking in the sounds and scents of the environment. At performances in Gorse Hill, the audience can find grapes and strawberries hanging from branches of the willow, along with instruments made from household items such as pots, waven pipes and table tennis bats. For indoor performances, Davis also tries to include sensory experiences and interactive activities. At a performance at The Courthouse Arts Centre in Tinahely, Co. Wicklow, in 2009, the audience could stroll through crunchy autumn leaves and egg shells, while being offered wild flowers and bags of moss to smell. Through participation, the roles of the performer and audience become more fluid, like in Authentic Movement practice where the mover and witness are part of a dynamic relationship rather than the mover becoming an object of the gaze. Kelly Oliver (2001:15) notes that 'subjectivity is founded on the ability to respond to, and address, other – what I am calling witnessing'. In other words, witnessing involves relating to the other, and unlike disciplinary procedures that isolate individuals, Maya Lila explores the 'ecology' of performers and audience working in dialogue.[2] For example, in one of my experiences of the Willow and Mirror Tunnel, I noted down some of my sensory and emotional experiences:

> Recalling now my tingling toes as I watch a dancer reach out of the tunnel and grasp the bark of the tree, almost within touching distance. Feeling my own

> resting palms, the smell of bark, a smile crossing my lips as I wait and wonder what will happen next. I decide to move on. The whole front of my body feels like it is opening out, eyes wide open and palms touching the brittle sheep skulls hanging on the willow. My eyes rove around to catch sight of a dancer on the ground and I feel a deep weight taking over my body as I want to sink down beside her, smelling the soil, smudging my hands and clothes … but I stop as I meet a colleague, breath rising into my chest, I am chattering in an effort to soothe his fright at seeing the skulls. (author's notes 2009)

Here, I notice my subjective experiences as they are produced through interaction with the dancers, the audience and the environment. In this way, it is my sensory, subjective experience that creates my perspective on the performances.

In addition, through the use of mirrors in several performances, Davis reminds the audience that they are gaining a subjective perspective. Again, this removes the primary emphasis from the performers' bodies, guiding the audience to take part in the 'mover–witness exchange' of Authentic Movement.[3] Jacques Lacan's 'mirror stage' provides a framework for understanding Davis' play with ideas of reflection in Maya Lila. Lacan (1977:5) theorizes that because the infant has limited motor control, the mirror image provides a more coherent self-image, 'which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality'. Davis plays with the 'mirror stage' through the reflection and alteration of identities in Maya Lila as audience members are often invited to dress up in hats, bracelets and necklaces made from feathers, seaweed and bones, amongst other materials. They are provided with odd-shaped, broken shards

of mirror to view their new image, reflecting only parts of the viewer at one time. This perhaps represents how the self is divided rather than coherent and whole as experienced in the 'mirror stage'. At the same time, audience members sometimes strongly identify with this new image, as when one audience member jumped onto a tree stump and brandished a 'sword' made from dried pampas grass. The audience can also see their self-image distorted in the full-length convex and concave mirrors in the Willow and Mirror Tunnel, showing yet another perspective on the unstable self. Davis has recently acquired plexiglass that is reflective and also transparent, so that the looker is seeing the self and others simultaneously. The constant reminder of seeing oneself alongside experiencing sensory responses reinforces the process of subjective engagement that is central to the performances.

Figure 3: Mirror and Plexiglass, with Henry Montes, Joan Davis and Elmar Jung at Dance House. (Photograph: Paul Harris.)

The psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott develops an interpretation of the mirror stage, emphasizing the metaphorical aspects of 'mirroring'. He notes that:

> The glimpse of the baby's and child's seeing the self in the mother's face, and afterwards in the mirror, gives a way of looking at analysis and at the psychotherapeutic task. Psychotherapy is not making clever and apt interpretations; by and large it is a long-term giving the patient back what the patient brings. (1967: 269)

In Maya Lila, the stimulation of the audience's sensory awareness and self-reflection through the mirrors, suggests a parallel with this aim of giving back the subjective experiences that the audience bring to the performance. However, this is quite a different

understanding of the 'mirror stage' in comparison with Lacan's, and Ian Craib (2001: 131) notes that 'for Winnicott the mirror is the mother's face and it offers a reflection of the self that the infant can take on as part of its move to integration. For Lacan it is an imaginary identification that divides us from ourselves'. In Maya Lila, Davis appears to be playing with both the division from self and the reflection of self in relationship with the surrounding environment. The reflexivity encouraged through the sensual stimulation and the use of mirrors provide an opportunity for the audience to notice subjective identity in relationship with others. At the same time, the idea of having a secure or fixed identity is constantly deferred, such as when audience members choose costumes that alter their appearance and movements. Throughout the performances, somatic impulses also continually appear and transform, and identities are destabilized by the constant adaptation to the environment. The interactions between the audience and performers further indicate the interdependence of identities on the contexts that produce them.

The mirrors in Maya Lila can also provide a point of reflection on visual culture by bringing awareness to experiences of self-image and self-consciousness. At an indoor performance in Dance House in Dublin, Davis included the full-length mirrors already in the dance studio rather than covering them over with curtains, perhaps again in order to encourage self-reflection. The presence of the mirrors in the studio can also represent the prioritization of the external viewpoint in many dance trainings and performances. Dancer Henry Montes (1 August 2009 interview) comments that 'because it has a history of being a dance studio, it's quite loaded. You walk in there and you suddenly feel really self-conscious about the way you look in the mirrors'. However, the varying responses to the mirrors from identification to self-consciousness represent the provocation of the

audience to notice personal reactions to the work. Instead of a finished performance choreographed by Davis, Maya Lila includes the sensations, movements, images and narratives of participants. The move away from disciplinary and surveillant procedures in creating the work, means that the audience is encouraged to experience the performances as their own, rather than watching and interpreting what the author–creator 'means'. There is a paradox here that through disengaging from the habitual power dynamic of the gaze between the audience and performer, the audience can, in fact, gain ownership over their own experience.

After encountering the mirrors and sensory engagement in the Willow and Mirror Tunnel, I have noticed my own psychophysical responses and personal narratives emerging even in the act of sitting and watching. For example, at one performance in Gorse Hill, I explored the Willow and Mirror Tunnel for half an hour and then felt tired enough to seek out a place to rest. As I sat down in the amphitheatre space at the end of the garden, musician Nicholas Twilley was playing a classical guitar, while dancer Simon Whitehead was moving with a hat in one hand and a maraca in the other. I imagined that the hat was a sombrero and I started to develop a shifting narrative about the dance. I thought of a *terero* after a bullfight, dancing in celebration under the setting sun. I could feel a sense of heat in my chest, a looseness and relaxation in my limbs as I imagined the warm sun at the end of a long but rewarding day. I also took delight in Simon's movement, staccato footwork, arms reaching upward and head thrown back. In my imagination, the scene then became a dance of abandon as I imagined Simon dancing as part of the crowd at a carnival. Smiling, warm and relaxed, I looked around the amphitheatre and noticed people covered in raincoats and holding umbrellas. I then

realized the contrast between the real and imaginary landscapes, between the performance and my engagement with a fictional narrative, which made my body feel warm despite the falling rain.

Occasionally there is confusion over how to respond to the work because audience roles have been altered in Maya Lila. In 2006, I attended a Maya Lila performance where one audience member applauded at the end and then stopped abruptly when no one else joined in. Baz Kershaw questions the place of applause in theatre, as he states that:

> The taming of the audience through the historical suppression of unruly responses in the theatre, the narrowing of the repertoire of overt reactions in reception, the consequent elevation of applause to make it *the* major expression of audience as community in the later twentieth century: these processes indicate, I think, Western mainstream theatre's increasing capitulation to near-fascistic vectors in its socio-political environment. (2007: 190)

Because the disciplinary codes of creating performance are turned inside out in Maya Lila, the expected behaviours of the audience are also challenged. In order to invite the audience to respond in new ways, Davis attempts to frame the experience as different from other performances, and the installation environments have been vital to awakening the somatic sensibilities of the audience and bringing them into the role of co-creators. At the most recent performances at Dance House in Dublin in June 2010, the audience were also guided by a storyteller into a dream world, where they were given tasks to complete as part of the journey. They were invited to build structures made from wood and mirrors, dress up in costumes, take on new names, share food and swap positions, all of which fed

in to the dancers' activities. The idea of a 'dedication' was also introduced to replace the 'curtain call' of bowing and applause. At the end of the performance the audience are asked: 'If this has touched, impacted, disturbed, or moved you in any way, then what of that can you bring back to your community, family, or the wider world?' (Davis 2007: 166). The dedication invites the audience to create their own understandings of the performance material that has been presented and to reflect on how the experience might relate to what happens outside the performance space.

This type of open-ended invitation for interpretation relates to postmodern approaches to making performance, and indeed Davis' early career with Dublin Contemporary Dance Theatre was heavily influenced by visiting postmodern choreographers. Helen Thomas notes:

> Postmodernism and poststructuralism, [however], emphasize the 'death of the author' (the traditional speaking subject), the unfixing of the text (that had been fixed by the arbitrary relation of the signifier and the signified in semiotics), and the shift towards the readers/viewers as writing/ choreographing the text/dance and combining the ingredients in any way they choose. (1996: 81–82)

As postmodern theory proposes that the readers can develop their own interpretations, Thomas rejects the idea that postmodern choreographers can 'train' the audience to perceive in new ways as this limits the potential for multiplicity of reading. This is also an issue in Davis' work, where she wants the audience to co-create at the same time as inviting the audience to engage in particular ways, such as dressing in costumes and interacting with the installations. These activities are set up in order to invite the audience to move beyond their everyday behaviours and to take on new perspectives. However, the

audience is informed that they do not have to take part if they do not wish, with the result that there are costumed participants beside those with no costume, and some audience members take part in sensorial exploration while others sit and chat. Although Davis' choices (e.g. of objects or dancers) may elicit certain responses, in my view, the exploration of audience interaction offers rather than shuts down a multiplicity of meanings. At each performance, of course, the audience forms a group with a collective field of response on a particular day – for example, the 'heavy' atmosphere of a performance at Dance House in Dublin was noted by a few dancers and audience members. On the other hand, each individual takes part in the collective in different ways – for example, one person might pick up the bones or wool hanging in an installation while another might be uncomfortable interacting with the environment.

The constant negotiation between the history of the body and emergent responses are a dynamic part of the Maya Lila performances. One example of this is how the audience negotiates the usual codes of responding to performance with the possibilities for psycho-physical and sensory participation. Foucault (1977: 219) notes that 'discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it established calculated distributions'. As both audience and performers wander and play at Maya Lila, they produce unpredictable encounters through movement in space. At the same time, restrictions to such possibilities are brought to the awareness of participants, as they are invited to reflect on their own capacity for engagement in the work. Rather than aiming for 'free expression', Maya Lila concentrates on evoking a reflective attitude to habitual behaviour patterns that emerge within the performances. For example, at the

Courthouse Arts Centre in Tinahely, the audience chose largely to stay seated rather than explore the option of climbing the stairs to view the performance from an overhead balcony. In attending the Maya Lila performances in a variety of environments, I have noticed that arts centres often reproduce systems of interaction through their spatial layout, stimulating the expectations of the audience to become still, silent spectators. In placing Maya Lila at the gardens in Gorse Hill, the opportunities for interaction and new responses are opened up by the outdoor setting and organization of space. At the same time, Davis clearly sets out to alter audience expectations at the indoor performances through providing opportunities for interaction. At one point, some audience members at Tinahely got up from their chairs to form a tug-of-war with the dancers, while others stayed in their chairs to watch. In effect, it is the juxtaposition of the perceived restrictions to behaviour with the possibility for mobility and interaction that produce a form of drama in Maya Lila.

As Foucault suggests, discipline and surveillance are a part of how contemporary society operates. With the emphasis on production and consumption in society, it is difficult to evade disciplinary approaches to performance. Fortin et al. (2009: 49) note that ‘dance is usually a site where the subject has been traditionally objectified and health issues dismissed in favour of the aesthetics of the art form’. Indeed, the performer becomes the perpetrator of discipline in order to adapt to the cycle of production in an efficient way, and therefore the subject is a site of compliance through self-discipline of the ‘unruly’ body. At the same time, however, the operation of discipline through the body is interrupted by the very struggle that discipline creates, in forms such as injuries, exhaustion, involuntary movements and other physical revolts. Somatic training provides

an opportunity to explore these gaps and difficulties as a source of creative material, and notice how environment, society and culture affect the body. In addition, it can be argued that disciplinary attitudes, and particularly approaches to dance training and production, are challenged by performances such as Maya Lila that embed a somatic approach into performance.

It is the struggle between disciplinary and somatic attitudes to the body that brought me to research Davis' work. As an actor, I was drawn to movement as an expression of subjectivity and agency, arising out of my experiences at hospital as a child. Subject to constant surveillance, documentation and normalization at hospital, I tried to find ways to express the trauma of the experience in acting out procedures on my favourite teddy. At the same time, the hospital experience caused me to dissociate from my body in order to survive the emotional and physical discomfort. Physical theatre provided a means for me to explore the active body but reinforced my understanding of the body as an object to be disciplined. In engaging with a somatic approach through Davis' work, I reflected on what had become a behaviour pattern of alienation from and control of my body. In my training sessions with Davis, I began to learn an alternative form of 'discipline', which involved waiting for and witnessing impulses, along with producing clarity of expression without imposing forms on the body. Trying to integrate the somatic approach with pursuing doctoral research again brings up the issue of discipline of the body–mind. It is important for me to document and analyse the type of work that Davis does by undertaking historical and theoretical research, although I fear doing this to the detriment of losing my own voice. This can have disastrous results, as Tami Spry notes on her academic career:

> I networked, performed intellectual-white-middle-class-liberal-feminist, and was wounded and inflicted wounds common in the competitive battlefield of the academy. I used my body as a billboard, advertising all of the insightful thoughts and attractive personal attributes required for full membership into the academic fraternity. I distorted my scholarly voice into a distanced, disembodied, phallocentric mimicry. I dissertated, published, tenure-tracked, nursed a dying mother, birthed a child, maintained a troubled marriage, and finally, inevitably, thankfully, had a mental breakdown. (2000: 86)

While Spry's account is an extreme case, I have found it necessary to enact a certain amount of discipline in order to complete the research. Participation in practice-based research has helped me work towards body–mind balance during the process, as I have attended Davis' training modules along with developing a performance piece from somatic practices. Locating my own voice is an ongoing area of exploration for me as I move between researcher and practitioner, trying to find ways of writing that can articulate my perspective on Maya Lila, and the impact of my subjectivity and autobiography on the research process.

Notes

[1] They are referring to Jill Green's (2007) writing on dance education.

[2] Kershaw (2007) describes theatre as an ecology of interrelated elements.

[3] Goldhahn (2007) suggests that the title 'Authentic Movement' does not represent the democratic and participatory aspects of the approach, and she adopts the phrases 'mover–witness exchange' and 'mover–witness paradigm' to describe the work.

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